

### **A Message For Our Times**

*Romans 13: 1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*

*Matthew 8:8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. 10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled...*

In observing recent current events, one is struck with the disorder that is coming to characterize the thought and behavior of many, whose faces and actions have been on far too visible display. I am reminded a great deal of the cultural situation in which my own youthful thoughts were formed, back in the Sixties. The mood then was one of destruction. There was nothing worth saving among the old order. It was all under the sentence of execution, simply because we had been born into it without our consent, had not authored it, and therefore had become subject to its arbitrary imposition upon us. Today all of us live in the aftermath of those days, among the wreckage and rubble that have been the result. But we dare not speak of it that way, nor call it what it is: the product of folly and willfulness. No, we are under cultural command to change our definitions. Whatever we once knew as the meanings of “up,” “down,” “crooked,” “straight,” “right,” “wrong,” “child,” “man,” “woman,” “father,” “mother,” have been altered according to the dictates of those who have taken control of both the use of language and the media which proclaim it. It is a veritable coup d’etat, without force of arms, but accomplished swiftly and easily, in large part because of the abdication of those who could have mounted a resistance, but didn’t realize the magnitude of the battle, nor the depth of conviction necessary to win it.

Disorder in a culture is the consequence of the disorder of its components, the people who comprise it. Medical and mental conditions in which the machinery of bodies and minds are malfunctioning are rather coldly and analytically referred to as disorders. Something is not working properly. The parts of the whole have been disturbed and are out of balance. That which would naturally and usually function harmoniously becomes at odds both with itself and with that which surrounds it.

We would assume under reasonable conditions that normality and abnormality are readily identifiable by standards that are generally accepted. It is easy, isn't it, to conclude, for example, that those things in civic life which promote well-being, peace, accord, hope, and happiness, are to be desired, whereas that which produces misery, division, dysfunction, and despair are to be renounced and avoided? It would only be an indicator that something is gravely wrong —out of order— if such standards went unrecognized or were even rejected.

Today's Epistle speaks of social order, and commands the Christian to recognize it. It is clearly a part of a believer's effective witness to the community that he is law-abiding and respectful of authority. Even if his attitude is not shared by others, it should be plain that his allegiance to what is right is of great importance to him. He realizes that virtue often requires the subjugation his own rights, will, and preferences to the greater good.

Even today's Gospel speaks to this issue. Notice that Jesus took no issue with the centurion, who clearly states that he expects those under his authority to obey him. So great is his faith that he recognizes that Christ has the very same power to miraculously adjust the physical elements, themselves.

As Christians living in times characterized by increased disturbance and disruption, it is essential that we strive for order, within our own selves individually. in our families, and among ourselves as a people. Order means harmony, harmony between what we profess, and what we actually are. Harmony between what we know God wants us to be, and what we are striving to become. Consciences that are at ease, because we do not live in continual violation of them. Thoughts that are not running wild, driven along by the spirit of the age as it is projected to us at every quarter, but as calm and as sensible as the Holy Spirit to whom we have yielded the control of them.

This is not accomplished passively. It takes work. Some of us are naturally well ordered in our personal habits and lives: a drawer for every tool; a jar for every knick-knack; a hand on every detail, so that nothing goes unnoticed. For others among us, there isn't the slightest hope for such a thing. But spiritual tidiness is of an entirely different order. It is not dependent upon propensities, but upon priorities. Its achievement amounts to a significant victory, for nothing, not even our own natures, normally tend toward it.

What are its components? Lives lived in continual recollection of the presence of God. "Recollection" used here is an old-fashioned term meaning consciously acknowledging the presence of God in the circumstances of the day. At home. At work. Driving. In stress. In pleasure. Turning the heart and mind upward, and recalling the God who should be central to all human experience. What else? Prayer. Bible study. Church attendance. Fellowship. Homes and marriages which reflect God's intention. All of these will serve, over time, to produce an ordered

Christian life. The end point is spiritual maturity and wholeness. The words *whole* and *holy* have the same etymological base. To become holy is to become whole: of one piece, well-ordered, integrated, united, complete. Is this not what you've always wanted to be? It certainly is God's ultimate goal for you.

But it is clear, in the meantime, that we as a Church can do very little for a world that is embracing chaos if we are not seeking order both within and among ourselves. Soon the church will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It remains to be seen just how such an event will be treated. Will it be seen as a permanent detente between irreconcilable branches of the Church that can never be reunited? Can there really be rejoicing under such circumstances? For all of the justifiable arguments on both sides of the question, can such a state of things in Christ's Body be pronounced "good"? I hope there are those who will refuse to be satisfied, but will this matter even be viewed as the principal concern before the Church at this hour.

All around us, in our confusion, in our political debates, in our ecclesial divisions, the great and grand order of God proceeds unperturbedly, happily indifferent, or at least trying to be so, to the turmoil that is the fruit of sin. True, the earth and its environs suffer because of it. But the seasons proceed onward in their appointed array. Sun, moon, and stars remain supremely unaffected. And above all, the Holy Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— exist in eternal order and harmony, as always they have, and always they will.

If a culture persistently rejects even its founding documents that were put in place for the purpose of restraining extremism, either among the leadership or among the people, reasonable men must resort to a higher imposition of order, and it must begin with their own personal lives. No pieces of paper, no matter how hallowed, no matter how well protected in bullet-proof glass cases, can rule the hearts of men, without their consent and permission.

But the God who authored order, who sanctifies it, commands it, and blesses it, is not nor ever has been diminished in power.

As we allow Him to order us, He will allow us to order others.

But it will be primarily by example.

Nothing else is, nor should be, acceptable.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*